

January 23, 1973

*Amh. R*

Mr. Thomas McElhiney  
Inspector General,  
Foreign Service  
S/IG  
Department of State  
Washington, D.C. 20521

Dear Tom:

Thanks very much for sending me the inspection report on the International Narcotics Control Program. The members of my staff primarily concerned and I find it a first-class job which focuses upon the essential points.

We agree with the basic thrust of the report and with its "main themes": that international narcotics control is primarily a political and diplomatic (in the broad sense) problem, not a technical one; that it is much more than an extension of domestic activities abroad; that there is a real (and unfulfilled) need for central coordination and leadership, which can best be exercised effectively in Washington by the Department and that to this end the Department should make a firm commitment to international narcotics control, ask for the resources to deal with the problem effectively and apply to this foreign political/operational problem the techniques which have worked in other problems of an analogous nature.

Our only general difference with your recommendations is that they do not go far enough and do not fully reflect the "operational phase" of the INCP into which we have now entered in many countries. Since the field replies to your questionnaire--and even since the date of your report--our experience here, at least, has changed in kind, and we have learned lessons about problems we had not fully anticipated. While the early days of the program concentrated on exhortation and later on planning for training and similar programs, the name of the game now is day-to-day diplomatic/police operations.

These operations are extremely complex and often delicate. They involve meshing the strategy and tactics of police agencies in the two countries in their ongoing narcotics investigations; exchanging information, tips, leads, etc., with speed and precision; keeping track of a number of inter-related cases and investigations, and of their relevance to a

Declassified Authority: 44281 By: Laurie Madsen  
Date: 04-14-2015

constantly-changing pattern of major narcotics trafficking routes; determining when (and sometime in what country) suspects should be arrested, interrogated and tried; handling extradition, deportation and other techniques of moving arrestees internationally; knowing and manipulating the bureaucratic politics of the local government well enough to get what we want (e.g., deportation of important suspects to the U.S.) without adverse repercussions, etc. These kinds of fast-moving, complex operations, often fraught with political and intelligence implications, require a tightly-run field organization under complete policy control; they also require close operational/political coordination in Washington among a variety of agencies some of which are relatively inexperienced in foreign operation of this sort.

In the field what is required is close coordination of action and relations with police and other agencies, the effective mobilization of all necessary resources at the post, and above all tight policy control.

Because the DCM is the only officer with the necessary rank and authority to meet these requirements, I have made him responsible, not only for general coordination, but for active direction of the INCP, particularly in its operational aspects. The working instrument is not the formal narcotics action group (essentially a discussion group for general narcotics policy) but a small operational unit [REDACTED]

FOIA(b)-(1)

[REDACTED] which meets daily or more often if necessary under the DCM's chairmanship to review current operations, insure that all information is shared, and take the necessary operational and reporting decisions for all agencies.

I hope that after awhile it will be possible to devolve some of this responsibility (which now consumes as much as 50 percent of the DCM's working day on the average and sometimes even more) to another officer; but at least until the relations in Washington are worked out and those with our counterparts are routinized, this kind of close supervision from the front office will remain necessary. We have, however, reached the point where we badly need a full-time narcotics control officer at the Class III level, to relieve the DCM of all but the actual

direction responsibility (perhaps half of his narcotics time); to take over from the Political Counselor the latter's many duties in this field (e.g., training arrangements) which occupy an inordinate part of that officer's time and attention; and to manage the whole range of police liaison operations which can be done much more effectively and consistently than by a case-oriented BNDD officer who is necessarily on the road most of the time.

But when all is said and done, our problems in the field are relatively manageable as compared with those in Washington--even as dimly perceived from here. The most hampering, of course, must be the corrosive division between Customs and BNDD. This outdated bureaucratic struggle not only is wasteful of resources and creates static in the communications channels, but it also encourages rivalry between their agents abroad and can make us look ridiculous to the police agencies of other countries. And it tends to encourage at least BNDD (with which we have direct experience) to judge the performance of its agents by how many arrests and seizures they bring about through their personal activities rather than by the contribution they make to an integrated country effort.

The sooner this problem is dealt with in Washington the better. I hope the rumors we have heard of the establishment of a single foreign narcotics service is true, and in that case I hope the Department will fight hard, perhaps using the FSR system, to bring this new foreign service under a single, disinterested management which will strengthen discipline and cooperation in the field. (Incidentally, such an arrangement would also do away with the inordinate amount of time BNDD--and probably Customs--agents abroad must spend administering themselves when the Embassy could do it for them more efficiently and with very little increase in effort.)

From a field operations viewpoint, the other most urgent areas requiring Washington changes are decision-making and communications. The nature of these narcotics operations is such that the decisions required often need an input from not only BNDD and/or Customs Headquarters but from their field offices, from U.S. attorneys concerned; and, from time to time, INS, Justice, CIA, the Department's Legal Office and relevant Regional Bureau. From here this network appears largely unorganized and the process somewhat haphazard. In cases of any complexity we can see few indications that any one person

or group is calling all the shots in accordance with a single strategy and set of priorities; and we have had several instances in which we have received conflicting instructions from different agencies. As a result we often have had to rely on our own judgment of where the balance of U.S. interest lies and count on an energetic and fast-moving desk officer to wrest the necessary back-up instructions from the Washington mill. The problem is that we do not necessarily have a clear picture of what is going on at the real "front" in the U.S. We have been helped very much in this regard by the frequent presence on TDY of BNDD and Customs case officers from the U.S. who know that end of the problem in detail, but in a well-run operation the objectives should be set by a rational process in Washington.

It is of course difficult to know from this distance how best to approach this problem. But I wonder if we could not use previous successful experiences as a guide and establish a permanent drug operations task force in, say, the operations center, or some other central point to backstop this kind of bilateral or multilateral police operation. Such a group could be headed by an FSO with operational flair and experience, assisted by responsible representatives of BNDD, Customs, CIA and perhaps Justice. The group could backstop all aspects of operations such as our own "springboard", and insure that the field received instructions which were not only timely but took account of all the factors and agency interests.

The Task Force approach might also help greatly with the communications problem, which remains a serious one. The NAROP system is for all intents and purposes useless, because the distribution is so limited and so slow that NAROP telegrams typically do not reach the action officer (usually our Desk Officer) until we have already been on the phone on the subject. We have therefore virtually abandoned the use of this series, and I have the impression other posts have probably done the same. But it is extremely difficult for us in the field to know, who among all the agencies in Washington concerned, needs to receive a particular telegram, especially as we often do not know if Customs and BNDD or both are working on a particular case.

The principal problem is the multiplicity of channels, and its simplest solution would be to insure that all narcotics cables go in State channels with a special indicator and that someone with a real knowledge of the field sees to it that such

Mr. Thomas McElhiney

-5-

cables get distributed electrically to the right places in Washington--and preferably New York. This is a very complex subject and will require much more study than we can give it from the field, but I do suggest it as a worthwhile one to be pursued either by the Inspection Corps or by those in the Department responsible for narcotics problems.

Once again, thanks for giving us the opportunity to comment on your excellent report, and I hope the above suggestions, based on field experience, will prove useful.

Sincerely,

William M. Rountree  
U.S. Ambassador to Brazil

HRE/BR - RFL: dd